

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONTREAL 1698

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJ: PROMINENT BICULTURAL JOURNALIST COMMENTS ON QUEBEC ELECTION

1. THE KNOWLEDGEABLE MONTREAL STAR POLITICAL COMMENTATOR, DOMINIQUE CLIFT, DISCUSSED HIS VIEWS OF QUEBEC ELECTION WITH CONSULS GENERAL HARPER AND MCNAMARA ON NOVEMBER 9. CLIFT, LIKE CLAUDE RYAN OF LE DEVOIR IN AN EARLIER CONVERSATION (MONTREAL 1699), PREDICTED LIBERAL VICTORY ON NOVEMBER 15 WITH SOME 65 OF 110 SEATS IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. HE TOO SEES FEAR DISPLACING ANGER AS MANY ERSTWHILE IRATE VOTERS REASSESS DECISION TO VOTE AGAINST LIBERALS. CLIFT PREDICTED SOME 30 SEATS FOR PQ AND SAID UNION NATIONALE WOULD BE FORTUNATE TO TAKE MORE THAN FOUR. HE SAID CLAIMS OF UN REVIVAL IS "GREAT HOAX." HE DOUBTS THEY WILL CARRY ANY ANGLOPHONE RIDINGS IN MONTREAL. WHATEVER SUCCESS THEY ENJOY WILL BE AMONG THEIR TRADITIONAL RURAL CLIENTELE.

2. CLIFT DID CONCEDE, HOWEVER, THAT HIS PREDICTIONS COULD BE FAR OFF MARK. OUTCOME OF THIS ELECTION, WITH FIVE PARTIES RUNNING CANDIDATES IN SOME RIDINGS, IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT. GROUND SWELL AGAINST LIBERALS COULD DEVELOP STRONG ENOUGH TO PLACE PQ IN POSITION TO FORM MINORITY GOVERNMENT. MORE THAN THAT IS "INCONCEIVABLE."

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3. THERE ARE TWO THRESHHOLDS BOURASSA MUST CLEAR IF HE IS TO RE-MAIN PREMIER. FIRST, THE LIBERALS MUST WIN MORE THAN 60 SEATS. SECOND, THE LIBERALS MUST GAIN MORE THAN 45 O/O OF THE FRANCOPHONE VOTE. FAILURE TO TOP EITHER OF THESE BARRIERS WOULD BE GREAT LOSS FOR PARTY AND FOR LEADER WHO LED THEM INTO ELECTION.

4. SHOULD BOURASSA FALTER, CLIFT SUGGESTED ANDRE REYNAULD AS PRIME CANDIDATE TO REPLACE HIM AS PARTY LEADER AND AS PREMIER IF LIBERALS SURVIVE AS RULING PARTY. HE ALSO MENTIONED GARNEAU AND SAINT-PIERRE AS TWO OTHER CANDIDATES FOR LEADERSHIP. HE DID NOT BELIEVE ANYONE FROM OTTAWA COULD BE SUCCESSFULLY INSERTED INTO POSITION, BUT CLAIMED FEDERAL LIBERALS WOULD HAVE LARGE VOICE IN SELECTION OF NEW PROVINCIAL LEADER.

5. IDEOLOGICAL DIVISIONS IN PARTI QUEBECOIS ARE MORE VISIBLE THAN DANGEROUS TO PARTY SURVIVAL. THE RADICAL WING IS NOT NUMERICALLY STRONG, CLIFT CLAIMED, AND THE DEPARTURE OF THESE ELEMENTS WOULD NOT REDUCE PARTY NUMBERS SUBSTANTIALLY. IN FACT, THE LOSS OF THE RADICALS MIGHT STRENGTHEN THE PQ BY FURTHER EMPHASIZING ITS MODERATE CREDENTIALS.

6. CLIFT BELIEVES SEPARATION IS INEVITABLE "IN THREE YEARS OR TEN, WHEN PEOPLE DON'T CARE ANYMORE." IT IS NOT JUST QUEBEC WHICH IS SEPARATIST, HE CLAIMED. THE WEST ALSO REJECTS THE OVER-CENTRALIZATION WHICH HAS TAKEN PLACE IN TORONTO AND ELSEWHERE IN ONTARIO SINCE WORLD WAR II. CANADIANS ARE NOW INSISTING ON DEVOLUTION OF POWERS AND OF SERVICES TO REGIONS.

7. SHOULD CONFEDERATION BE REPLACED BY A COMMON MARKET AND COMMON CURRENCY, CLIFT SAID FISCAL AND MONETARY POLICY FOR THE WHOLE AREA WOULD HAVE TO BE UNIFIED. MOREOVER, SOCIAL SERVICES SUCH AS GOVERNMENT HEALTH INSURANCE PLANS AND UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE WOULD ALSO OF NECESSITY BE COORDINATED. THUS, THE ONLY REAL CHANGE WOULD BE POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY.

8. COMMENTS IN MONTREAL 1699 ON ELECTION PROSPECTS ARE EQUALLY APPLICABLE TO MR. CLIFT'S PREDICTION. DISCUSSION WITH MR. CLIFT TOOK PLACE BEFORE HE HAD SEEN RESULTS OF LATEST PUBLIC OPINION POLLS STRONGLY FAVORING PQ.

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